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1.0 Introduction

This document is Stage I in an urban design/planning/architectural study whose purpose is to produce, following consultation with all stakeholders and the public, broadly agreed high quality designs and “place-making” proposals for the redevelopment of the city of Ely’s large area around the railway station, known as “The Station Gateway”. The intention to go ahead with such proposals is a main proposal in Ely’s Local and Master-plans.

The Station Gateway Site is an extremely important but problematic area for both the image and function of Ely. The site requires radical changes to become integrated into the existing valuable historic built environment and natural hinterland of Ely from whose character at present it is wholly divorced; currently the site is comprised of a superstore, a polluting busy road and industrial sheds.

This Stage I Report is an analysis of opportunities and constraints towards achieving the above aims - i.e. how to create a welcoming “gateway” befitting a significant city like Ely, and to improve the daily movement and environment of the many pedestrians and cyclists travelling to and from the station while simultaneously creating valuable, high quality developments. This document deals with the broad picture first - choices, objectives, concepts and opportunities, and not with the more detailed design and alternative concrete proposals which will follow in Stage II.

The site is located in Ely, East Cambridgeshire, and includes the existing railway station and its surroundings, covering an area of approximately 12.3 hectares. The site is bounded by the river Ouse to the east, the Cambridge business park to the west, Ely railway station to the south, and the city centre to the north. Ely has an estimated population of 18,000.

The proposals contained within this Stage I Report acknowledge the aspirations set out in the East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy 2006, Preferred Approaches;

- 1) To manage growth in a sustainable way, ensuring that new housing is supported by required services and facilities – for example, healthcare and education facilities, shops, open spaces and recreation facilities.
- 2) To provide new housing which meets the needs of the community, and increase the supply of affordable housing in the district
- 3) To protect and enhance the historic environment, and ensure that all new development reflects and/or is sympathetic to the distinctive character and appearance of the local area through design, the use of materials, layout and landscaping.
- 4) To protect the countryside from inappropriate development, and to protect and enhance the district’s natural environment including distinctive landscapes, habitats and biodiversity.
- 5) To protect and enhance the vitality and viability of the district’s town centres and main village centres, and stem the decline of rural services.
- 6) To support and encourage economic growth and job creation in the district where this would meet local employment needs and limit out-commuting.
- 7) To improve public transport links and provide increased opportunities for walking and cycling, including improved access to the countryside.
- 8) To minimise the impact that our community has on the environment and on climate change, by :

- » accommodating development in locations which limit the need to travel, particularly by car; and
- » through the facilitation and encouragement of recycling, composting, waste minimisation, energy efficient design and construction, and renewable energy production.

Ely Gateway Masterplan proposes a controlled level of growth in order to provide a stronger population base. This will support a comprehensive range of services and facilities, enhance the level of employment and self sufficiency in the City, and enable Ely to develop as a sustainable community.

Transport infrastructure development plays a dominant role in the considerations for development in the Ely gateway site. A key measure to enable Ely to accommodate population growth sustainably is the development of a strong public transport policy to encourage a shift away from car use, focusing on rail, bus, cycling and pedestrian network improvements, this will require significant upgrades to the access and interchange between public transport and pedestrians and cyclists with the gateway site. Additionally for any development within the gateway site to be of high quality, provide good public realm and to be well integrated within the city the traffic congestion cutting through the site on Angel Drove and Station Road will need to be addressed.

Employment is a core issue to encourage a population to thrive and grow, looking back to Ely’s historical relevance as a market, trading and high end office base for Cambridgeshire, methods will be implemented to encourage independent retail, business and investment.



Aerial view of Ely Gateway Proposal Site



Existing view of entrance to Ely Train Station



Unsheltered platform



View of car park from station exit

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2.0 Location

The site is located to the south-west of the city of Ely. The site covers areas to the west and east of Station Road, which along with Angel Drove to the north west are major industrial vehicle routes and currently experience large amounts of congestion and pollution.

The site at present is unsuccessful in promoting the beauty and character of this historical city. The site is currently an industrial area, with large unorganised warehouses and extensive parking. However these buildings and the rows of parked cars block both visual connectivity and direct access to both the Cathedral and the River Ouse.

The railway station is isolated from the city, cut off by heavy traffic and with car parking that dominates view on arrival. The station car parking is spread out over two sites at some distance from the station reducing accessibility. The train platforms, despite allowing for a view over the fens to the south, offer outdated accommodation with little shelter from the elements.

Considerate redevelopment of the site has the potential to frame the city of Ely, provide an appropriate place of arrival and sensitively respond to the historical city centre to the north.

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2.1 Heritage Context

Ely has a strong historical background. The city was founded in AD 673 by Etheldreda, daughter of Queen Anne she was an East Anglian princess, a Fenland queen and became the Abbess of Ely. The abbey Etherelda founded was destroyed in 870 by Danish invaders and then rebuilt by Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester, in 970.

The abbots of Ely then accumulated such wealth in the region that by the time of the Domesday survey (1086), it was the second richest monastery in England. The first Norman bishop, Simeon, started building the cathedral in 1083. The octagon was rebuilt by Sacrist Alan of Walsingham between 1322 and 1328 after the collapse of the original nave crossing on 22 February 1322. Ely's octagon is considered one of the wonders of the medieval world. Architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner believes the octagon "is a delight from beginning to end for anyone who feels for space as strongly as for construction" and is the "greatest individual achievement of architectural genius at Ely Cathedral".

Ely Cathedral was the first great cathedral to be thoroughly restored. Work commenced in 1845 and was completed nearly thirty years later; most of the work was carried out by the architect George Gilbert Scott.

Ely is built on a 60 km² Kimmeridge Clay island which, at 26m, is the highest land in the fens. Major rivers including the Witham, Welland, Nene and Great Ouse, feed into the fens and, until draining commenced in the seventeenth century, formed freshwater marshes and meres within which peat was laid down. There are two sites of special scientific interest in the city: a former Kimmeridge Clay quarry - which is now a nature reserve, and one of the United Kingdom's best remaining examples of medieval ridge and furrow agriculture.

Cherry Hill is the site of Ely Castle which is of Norman construction and is a United Kingdom scheduled monument. Of similar construction to Cambridge Castle, the 76m diameter, 12m high citadel-type motte and bailey is thought to be a royal defence built by William the Conqueror following submission of the Isle from rebels such as the Earl Mocar and the folk-hero Hereward the Wake. This would date the first building of the castle to circa 1070.

The economy of the region is mainly agricultural though before the fens were drained, the harvesting of osier (willow) and sedge (rush) and the extraction of peat were important activities, as were eel fishing and wild fowling. The city had been the centre of local pottery production for more than seven hundred years, including pottery known as Babylon ware. A Roman Road, Akeman Street, passes through the city; the southern end is at Ermine Street near Wimpole and its northern end is at Brancaster.

Little direct evidence of Roman occupation in Ely exists although there are nearby Roman settlements such as at Little Thetford and Stretham. A coach route, known in 1753 between Ely and Cambridge, was improved in 1769 as a turnpike (toll-road). The present day A10 closely follows this route; a south-western bypass of the city was built in 1986. Ely railway station built in 1845 is on the Fen Line and is now a major railway hub: north to King's Lynn, north-west to Peterborough, east to Norwich, south-east to Ipswich and south to Cambridge and London.

A regular Thursday and Saturday market takes place each week, drawing many people from the surrounding towns and hamlets, this is reflected in the number of local villages which have Thursday only bus service. Other than the main General Market there are three other market types that are held in Ely, Craft and Collectables, Farmers Market and Flower, Food and Craft

Annual fairs have been held in Ely since the twelfth century. Saint Audrey's (Etheldreda's) seven day fair, held on the 23 of June, was first granted officially by Henry I. Present-day annual events in Ely include Aquafest, which has been staged at the riverside by the Rotary Club on the first Sunday of July since 1978. Other events include the Eel Day carnival procession and the annual fireworks display in Ely Park. The Ely Folk Festival has been held in the city since 1985, and The Ely Horticultural Society have been staging their Great Autumn Show since 1927.

There are twenty three Grade I, six Grade II* and one hundred and fifty three Grade II listed buildings in the city of Ely.



Ely Cathedral



Roswell Pits to the north east of the Cathedral, formerly Kimmeredge Clay Quarry now a nature reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest



Cherry Hill Motte, the stone remains are hidden within the mound



Aquafest, 1st July; Ely River Boat and Raft Race



Eel Day May 5th 2012, Ellie the Eel, a giant version of the snake-like fish that was created by children at St Mary's Primary School and celebrations continued after the procession in Jubilee Gardens



Medieval re-enactors at Jubilee Gardens on Eel Day, eel throwing, folk music, people dressed up in period costumes etc. herald the sense of community in Ely



Oliver Cromwell's House lies just west of the Cathedral, guided tours and talks are held throughout the tourist season

2.2 Site Description

The site is bounded by the River Ouse to the east, the Cambridge business park to the west, Ely railway station to the south, and the city centre to the north.

The site is currently extremely unsuccessful in providing an accessible transport interchange, integration with the historic city to the north and an area of public realm that conveys a sense of arrival and the character of Ely. Presently the site is a totally unsatisfactory setting for closer views of the Cathedral. The site is currently occupied by a large Tesco Superstore, car parking and industrial warehouses. These areas are intersected by busy traffic and lack pedestrian accessibility.

The main issues;

a. Initial impressions

The site as a gateway to Ely is wholly unsuccessful in promoting the city. Arrival into the train station is greeted with a large Tesco, industrial units and busy traffic. Redesign of the site will create new views to the historic city centre and increased accessibility to the river Ouse, the Cathedral and city centre.

b. Permeability and access to the river

On arrival at the station industrial units obstruct the river from view. Pedestrians must traverse busy roads and industrial areas to gain access to the river. The public realm could be greatly enhanced with improvements to this connection, optimising the river as an amenity for the whole community and tourists.

c. Pedestrian access and desire routes

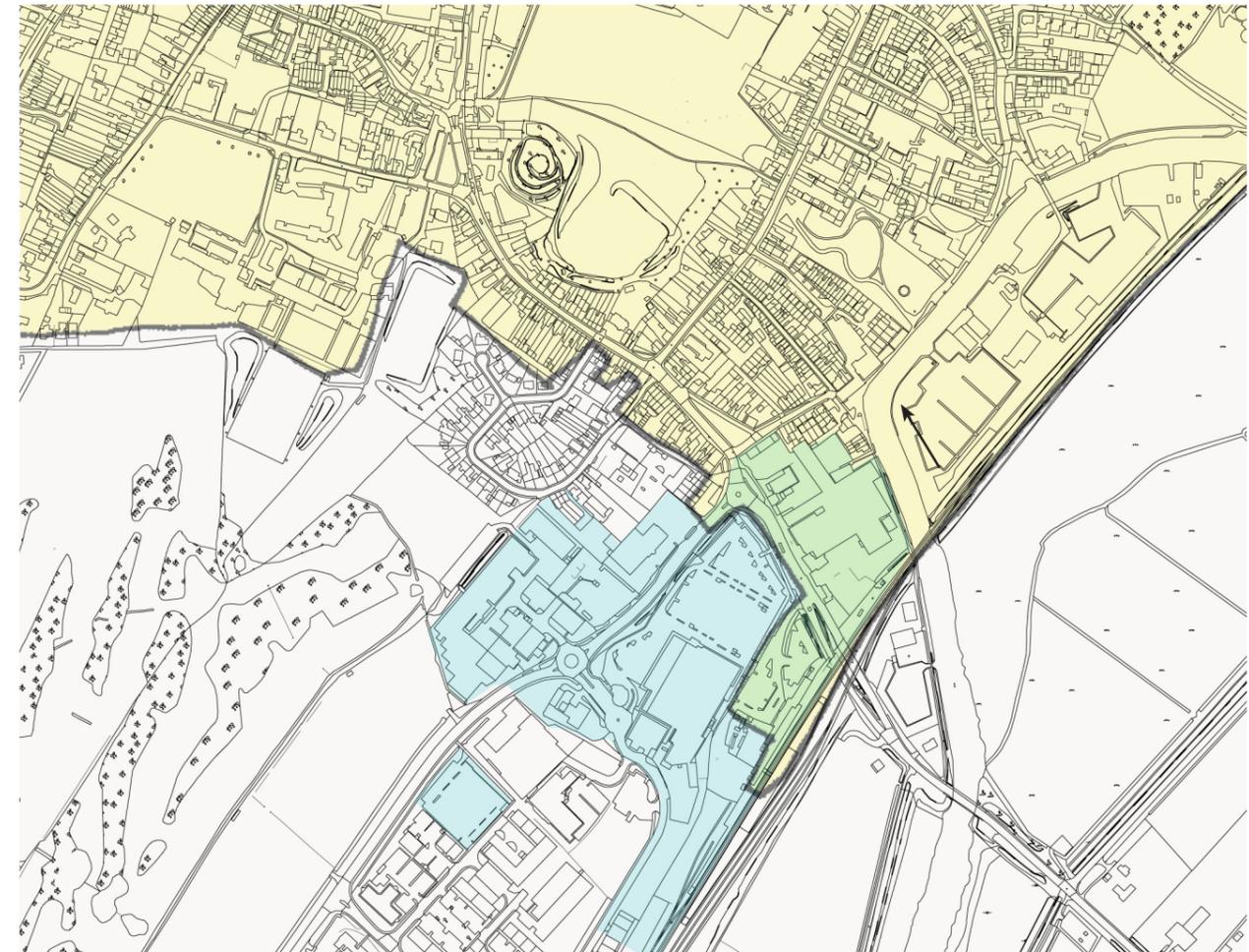
Pedestrian access between the gateway site and the city centre is currently very poor as the site is surrounded by heavy traffic and lacks pedestrian friendly routes. For a successful redevelopment of the gateway site pedestrian access must be significantly upgraded to integrate the site within the city. As part of this integration the site requires improved cycle routes, bicycle storage and parking.

d. Vehicle Access and Parking

Congestion occurs frequently on Station Road when the level crossing is closed as the H.G.V cannot use the current

underpass. The redesigning of this transport infrastructure is key to the success of any redevelopment of the Station Gateway site. Additional easily accessible car parking will need to be provided but in a far more subtle manner, than at present so as not to detract from the surrounding context.

A significant issue is that part of the site falls within the Ely Conservation Area. These areas are designated for their special architectural and historic interest. Thus care must be taken to understand the existing valued fabric of Ely before attempting any new developments.



Site is highlighted in blue

Conservation Area



2.3 Site Context (macro)

The existing site is an area of 12.3 hectares. The site itself comprises of a large Tesco Superstore, car parking and industrial areas.

To the north of the site terraced housing stretches up Back Hill towards the Cathedral. The housing is a mix of many different eras dating from the early 1900's to modern day. The Gallery leads off to the north of Back Hill and here one can find the historical buildings of the Cathedral and Priory dating back to 1200's. The Gallery then leads up to High Street and Market Street, both commercial areas, High Street the more historical of the two with strong views of the Cathedral and Priory.

The centre of Ely is dominated by the historical Priory, Cathedral and King's School which contribute significantly to its unique character. Modern Ely has expanded around these institutions with housing to the north east and west and industrial to the south.

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|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 1 Ely Holy Trinity Cathedral | 7 Ely City Golf Club | 13 The Park | 19 Nursery |
| 2 Train Station | 8 Bishop's House | 14 Bishop's Palace and Gardens | 20 Tesco Superstore |
| 3 River Ouse | 9 Stuntney Causeway | 15 King's School Sports Ground and Tennis Courts | 21 King's School Playing Fields |
| 4 Market Street | 10 Strikes Bowling Centre | 16 Willow Walk and Grove | 22 Industrial Units |
| 5 High Street | 11 Marina and Boat Houses | 17 The King's School | |
| 6 Boat Yards | 12 Cherry Hill Motte and Bailey | 18 The Cambridgeshire Business Park | |

2.4 Site Context (micro)

Key

- 1 Tesco Superstore
- 2 Tesco Parking
- 3 Ely Train Station
- 4 Station Parking
- 5 Station Parking
- 6 Ely Tyre Centre
- 7 former warehouse, now demolished
- 8 EMGFord Motorgroup
- 9 Tesco Petrol Station
- 10 River Ouse
- 11 Stuntney Causeway
- 12 Angel Drove
- 13 Bridge Road
- 14 Level Crossing
- 15 Bridge Boat Yard
- 16 Standen Engineering
- 17 The Boat Yard
- 18 Benton Car Works
- 19 Bus Stops



Aerial view of Ely Gateway Proposal Site



Key

- Site
- 1 Ely Train Station
- 2 Main Bus Station

Bus Routes

- 9 Bus Route
- 12 Bus Route
- 106 Bus Route
- 125 Bus Route
- Ely Bus Route

Other Routes
110, 115, 116, 117 & 129 only run 1 day a week

- River Route
- Cycle Trails
- Dedicated Cycle Lanes

2.5 Transport Infrastructure

The context diagram illustrates the proximity of the site to local transport interchange; main arterial road connections; green spaces; and cycle routes.

- i) Station Road and Angel Drive are main arterial roads that currently experience a high level of industrial traffic. The level crossing on Station Road causes significant congestion problems.
- ii) Ely Railway Station is within the site, therefore increasing accessibility to this facility is key to improving transport infrastructure within the city.
- iii) The site is bounded to the east by the river Ouse. This amenity is currently blocked from view and difficult to access across the busy Station Road.